

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2004

June 3, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Esper:

We are dismayed and gravely concerned regarding your recent statements and subsequent actions in response to the civil unrest in our nation. As Secretary, you have authority, direction and control over the Department of Defense. Your rhetoric and command set the standard for all who serve our country.

This week you described American streets and communities as a "battlespace" that must be "dominate[d]". Our own military doctrine, developed over the history of our nation and to which you are entrusted with executing, states that "dominate activities" are those that "focus on breaking the enemy's will" and "attacking weaknesses at the leading edge of the enemy's defensive perimeter." In response to this, let us be clear: United States citizens are not the enemy and our military should not plan or execute attacks against them.

More than 28,000 National Guard personnel are now deployed across 28 states and Washington, D.C., a greater force than the combined number of troops we currently have deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. The same military doctrine that defines our approach to our enemies states that activities which "enable civil authority" to support "legitimate civil governance" should be conducted through "agreement with the appropriate civil authority," "especially for operations within the US." It is imperative that any use of the National Guard or the armed forces adhere to these precepts, and our citizens are treated as Americans - not enemy combatants on the battlefield.

We are concerned that the actions by the armed forces in recent days indicate this is not the course you or the Department intend to take. Military police have been deployed from Ft. Bragg and other locations in preparation for potential operations in the nation's capital. Military helicopters have been used at extremely low altitude in a dangerous effort to disrupt protests. The

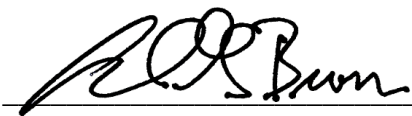
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has patrolled the streets of the District of Columbia in military fatigues. These actions are inappropriate under our military doctrine and the values of our society upon which they are built.

Around the nation, we have seen productive actions by our civil authorities to recognize the frustration felt by our communities and deescalate the unrest; from police chiefs kneeling alongside protestors to demonstrators standing shoulder-to-shoulder to protect our businesses and communities from vandalism. The strength that we have seen from these citizens and neighbors has set the example for how we can establish a peaceful and nonviolent foundation that reduces the intensity of the discourse and provides a path forward to constructive dialogue on the issues that face our country.

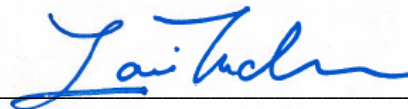
The actions that you and our armed forces take in the coming days will ultimately be viewed through the lens of history. As a leader you must have the confidence to stand alone and the courage to make tough decisions. Those under your leadership will be looking to you for the integrity of your words and the equity of your actions. As the civilian leader of our armed forces, we call on you to heed these words and set a standard for our servicemen and women that history will recognize as a positive force in the resolution of this unrest.

We recognize your statements today as a first step in this direction. We are hopeful that you will continue to listen to the needs of our nation and our communities to ensure that the victory that results is not based in military force, but in civility that provides equity and justice for all.

Sincerely,



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

/s/

Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress

/s/

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

/s/

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

/s/

Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

/s/

William R. Keating
Member of Congress

/s/

Andy Kim
Member of Congress

/s/

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

/s/

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

/s/

Elaine G. Luria
Member of Congress

/s/

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

/s/

Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress

/s/

Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

/s/

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress